

The Australian National University
Institute of the Arts



Canberra School of Art

GRADUATE DIPLOMA of ART
1996

Catherine Jordan

REPORT
PRESENTED IN FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE
GRADUATE DIPLOMA OF ART

CONTENTS

Abstract	2
Introduction	3
Concepts and Contexts	4
Work and Working Methods	9
Conclusion	16
Technical Notes	17
1995 Work Proposal	19
Acknowledgments	21
Curriculum Vitae	22
Bibliography	24

ABSTRACT

The work explores a personal reaction to Western society's definition of femininity.

A study taking the form of an exhibition of glass pieces exhibited at the Canberra School of Art Gallery from March 21 to 30, 1996, which comprises the outcome of the Studio Practice component, together with the report, which documents the nature of the course of study undertaken.

INTRODUCTION

*'She has to survey everything she is and everything she does because how she appears to others, and ultimately how she appears to men, is of crucial importance for what is normally thought of as the success of her life. Her own sense of being in herself is supplanted by a sense of being appreciated as herself by another.'*¹

The emphasis on appearance in Western society is a major influence on women's behaviour. Physical desirability in the West is based largely on appearance, and women are often judged on this level alone. Definitions of women's femininity are constructed primarily on the body, as a vessel for reproduction and as an object to be desired and used sexually.

My intention this year was to produce work that explores society's definition of femininity and reflects my feelings that arise from the psychological and physical pressures that Western culture places on women.

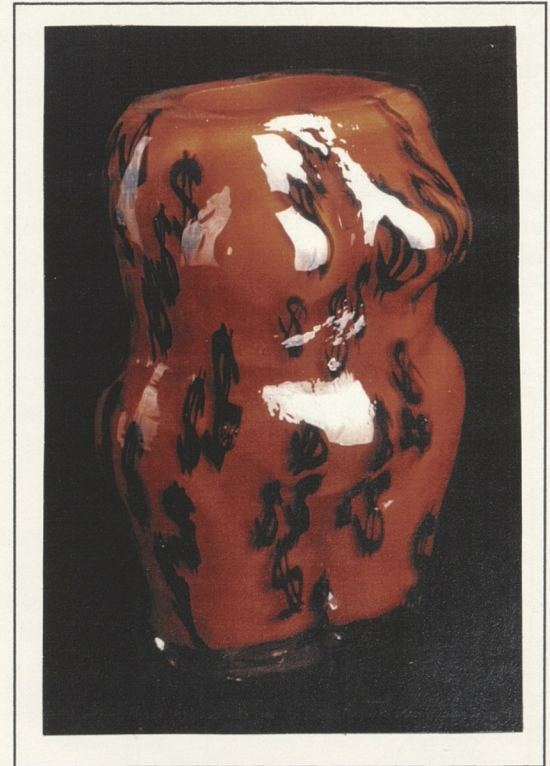
1. Berger (1972), p. 4.

CONCEPTS AND CONTEXTS

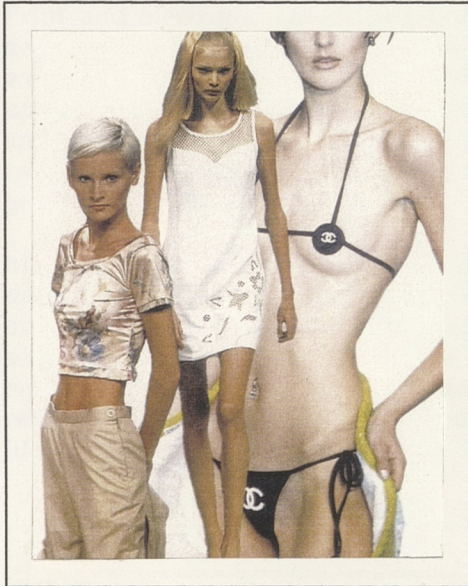
Industry is highly motivated by money. Industry aimed at female consumers is noticeably exploitative. A \$33 billion diet industry, a \$20 billion cosmetics industry and a \$300 million cosmetics surgery industry (Wolf 1990) are examples of how to make lots of money and lower a woman's self-esteem simultaneously. These industries are backed solidly by advertising. If magazines do not support their advertisements with correlating articles, the advertisers withdraw support and halt publication through lack of funds. Can you buy unbiased quality magazines for women? I don't think so. Advertisers deploy written material to convince women that the way they look is the most important aspect in life.

This manipulation of women's insecurities wouldn't be very lucrative if nobody believed that diet, exercise and a program of liposuction COULD make you look like Elle or Cindy. An exceedingly large profit margin encourages women on a downward spiral of never being quite soft enough, thin enough or desirable enough.

The fashion industry has a large proportion of unrealistic designers. Each season the emphasis on women's bodies changes, focusing on different body parts, such as legs, waists or breasts. For example, 'Wonderbras' are fashionable, exposing a huge cleavage, then six months later there's no room in clothes for any size breast at all. I find that disturbing, as the human body is not designed to change with fashion. Certainly, the 'waif' look was not a realistic or healthy fashion trend.



Untitled. H 180, W 110 mm.



Left: women modelling in Milan (*Cosmopolitan* magazine, December 1995).

Whoever decided this is a good look must have lost touch with reality. These models are now as thin as the mannequins seen in fashion shops. These models are so undernourished that their bodies will voluntarily shut down to conserve energy — menstruation also ceases. So, in the quest for achieving ultimate femininity (in the eyes of their society), these women are denying themselves a major part of what it is to be a woman.

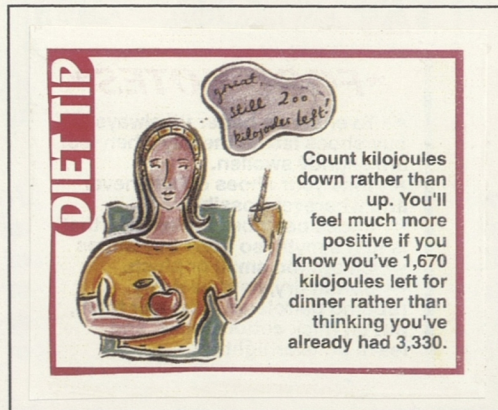
Anorexia nervosa and bulimia are fairly recent epidemics in the medical world. These diseases are physical evidence of the psychological damage promoted by the advertising machine. Women are given unrealistic role models and ridiculous ideals by which to measure their success, happiness and desirability. This leads us to believe that the way we look and the bodies we were born in are shameful and burdensome.

Is body image that important to females in the '90s? According to Naomi Wolf, author of *The Beauty Myth*, an estimated 80,000 people died from eating disorders in 1990 in the US, more than the country's total deaths from AIDS. Eighty thousand people seemed to think of body image as a life-or-death issue.



Print and electronic advertising bombard us constantly with negative feelings about ourselves. I have no idea how the average woman can possibly be adequate, if world-famous women aren't up to scratch: Kylie Minogue is too short, Geena Davis is too tall and Oprah Winfrey is bottom-heavy. Magazines tell us these women go to extraordinary lengths to hide these condemning facts.

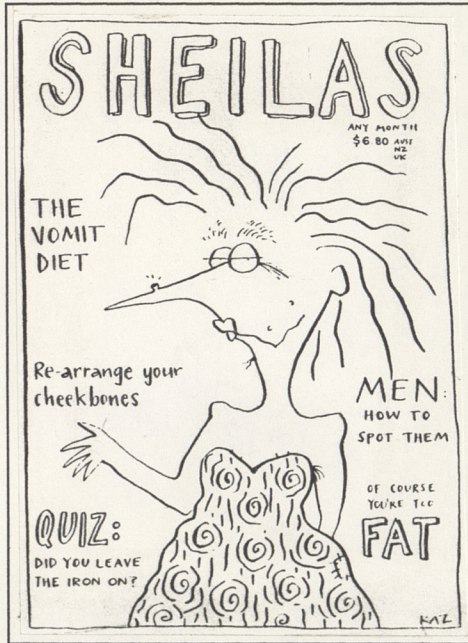
Magazines also ask 'Do you hate the way you look? Are bad hair days ruining your life?' and tell us countless ways of improving our bust lines and thighs. All these accusations and pointers on self-improvement can only mean that the majority of women are embarrassingly inadequate. No wonder ridiculously unrealistic relationships with separate parts of our bodies become matters of life importance.



Woman's Day magazine, 1995.

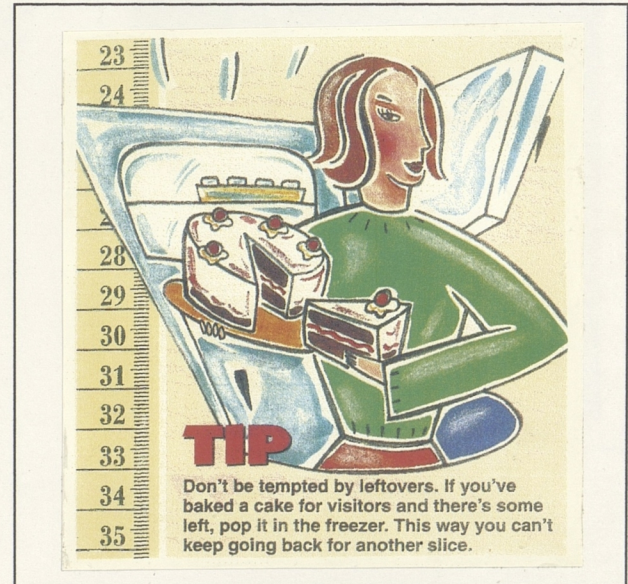


Skin Deep. H 180, W 110 mm.



Industry, through advertising, makes an extraordinary amount of money by playing on women's already-shaky self-esteem. Women are also encouraged to turn against each other. One particular advertisement for milk portrayed two women (who, incidentally, had model-like proportions) calling another a 'bitch' for sliding into a pair of very tight pants: advertisements for good, healthy, wholesome milk are on prime-time television teaching everyone down to toddlers that you are to despise and be jealous of anyone slimmer than yourself.

Right:
Woman's Day
magazine, 1995.

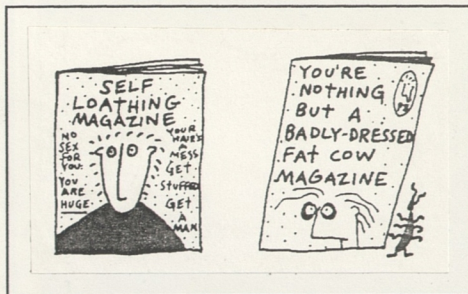


Advertising makes me angry. Advertisers do their job well in their daily bombardment of images and words. No matter how much I tell myself to ignore the blatant lies and pathetic ideals, advertising succeeds in affecting me. It gets under my skin, forcing me to think very negatively about myself. The worse I feel, the easier I find it to inwardly

criticise other women. I HATE being in that state of mind and fight very hard to accept myself as I am.

I have watched some very close girlfriends become obsessed with the way they look and it really frightens me. I try my hardest to explain that it's all a big trick and we've all been had, but I never know whether they understand.

What breaks my heart is that women are behaving ridiculously and DYING because they honestly feel they're never going to be happy with the body in which they were born. Campaigns combating AIDS promotes worldwide prevention. The 'waif' fashion promotes breast implants.

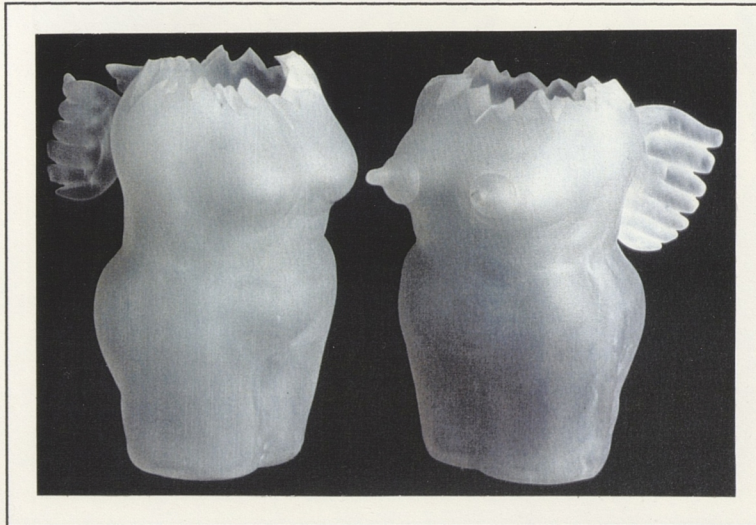


Measured. H 180, W 110 mm.

WORK AND WORKING METHODS

During the first half of the year, I was struggling for a metaphor with which to communicate my thoughts. I worked with a representation of the female figure blown into a two-part plaster mould. I used Paradise Paints on pre-blown bubbles and shards of glass. These were pre-heated in the kiln at 560°C so that they could either be picked up directly on a blowing iron or the shards applied to a bubble with a small 'bit' of hot glass.

I feel the results were too blatant, acting as an advertisement themselves rather than drawing the viewer in to ponder the meaning of the pieces.



Angels. H 180, W 110 mm.

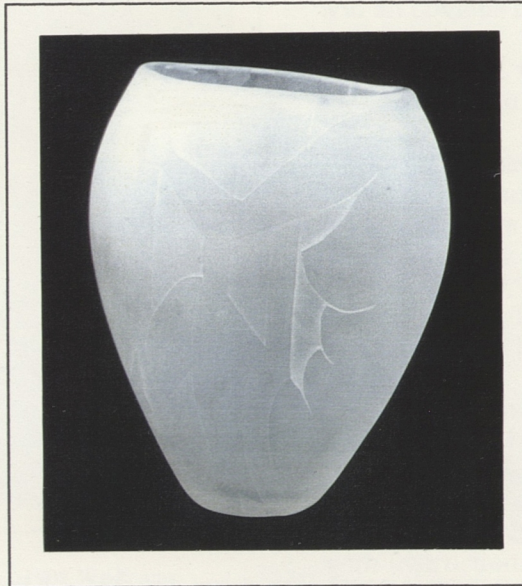
Moving on, I looked at the double-edged battleaxe, a symbol of strength for women. It was also the name of the magazine from the early 20th century suffragettes. I felt that this still didn't communicate anything meaningful.



Working drawings.
Each H 900, W 640 mm.

I started using the metaphor of a prison; women are imprisoned in bodies that society deem unacceptable and out of fashion — as hard as you try, there is no escape.

This led me to blow thick simple vessels and carve them with the sandblaster. These designs were the essence of a woman's figure with bars ambiguously placed. There was no one set plane, the bars actually being part of the body but extending beyond it.

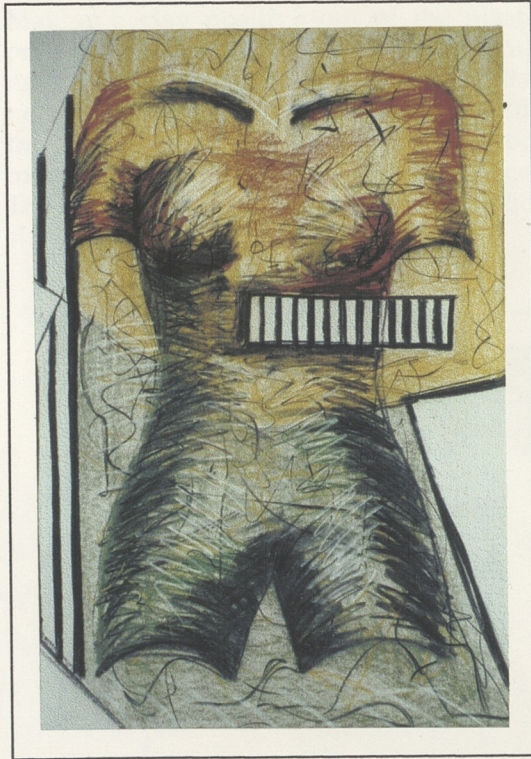


Left: Untitled.
H 210, W 160 mm.



Right: Untitled.
H 260, W 160 mm.

During a workshop given by Henry Halem, I was introduced to Blythe Enamels. These are low-firing paints, and I used them to highlight the vessels after the blowing and sandblasting, then firing the vessels to around 500°C.



Working drawing. H 900, W 640 mm.

I was still unhappy with these results. They appeared to be too contrived and weren't direct enough for what I wanted to say.

During a critique session with the students in the workshop, one of them pointed out that the 'bars' I had placed within my drawings could actually be read as bar codes.

This seemed to be very applicable. Bar codes mean consumerism and an obvious metaphor.

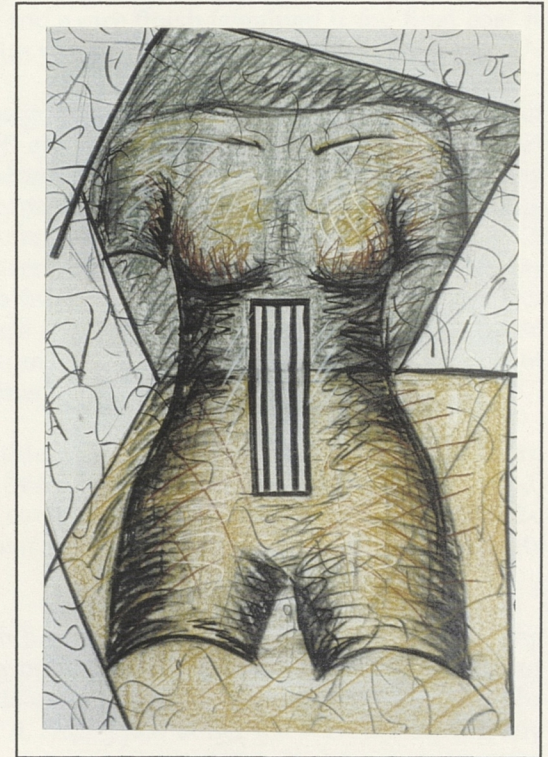
At this stage, I was doing slump tests of my hands into plaster moulds with the intention of slumping glass into the female form.

From near the start of the course, I had the front halves of a couple of plastic mannequins. I decided to explore the figure further by slumping glass over a plaster positive of the mannequin to achieve the look of the perfect body. However, I was cajoled into making a body cast of myself as my work would then become more personal. The fun began with a 200-g pot of petroleum jelly and about eight buckets of plaster ...

It wasn't comfortable, but it was very, very funny. Janeen went above and beyond the call of duty by building a clay wall around my perimeter from my neck to mid-thigh. I merely lay on the table in the mould-making room trying not to giggle at the antics going on around me. Eight buckets of cold, runny plaster were applied with instructions of 'stop laughing' and 'don't breathe'. It didn't

take very long for the plaster to set; however, it was exceedingly heavy and began to steam furiously. I then turned rather pale and said 'get this bloody thing off!'. Because of the extraordinary amounts of vaseline, I popped out of the mould, intact and *al dente*!

Making a clay positive out of the plaster revealed an ironic problem. As I was lying down to cast the mould, gravity had done its work and created rather large undercuts. A third of the breasts needed to be removed before the clay would release. If I had put the clay form back together true to the mould, the slumped glass may have also adhered to the clay because of the undercuts. Therefore, I effectively gave myself a 'boob job' for the large slumpings to work technically.



Working drawing. H 900, W 640 mm.



The positive body was made from raku clay because it is a groggy body and easily withstands shock. After firing it to bisque temperature of 980°C, I sanded it down and coated it with approximately five layers of kiln wash. The layers must be dry between coats, and a nice finish is gained if the final coat is smoothed down with your fingers.

I silk-screened a large bar code backwards onto the pieces of glass where 'target' areas are on the body: breasts, legs, waist and thighs. I then slumped the flat glass paint-side-up onto my clay body. The slumpings are designed to hang in front of large perspex distortion mirrors. By standing behind the glass and looking into the mirror, the viewer will be able to read the bar code correctly, see themselves and the transparent glass, but most importantly see a distorted image of all three. I wanted to illustrate how women get a grossly distorted image of themselves every time they look in a mirror.

The blown forms evolved into 'more-realistic' figures from the shoulders down to the stomach. Nigel made an observation at my final review: how would I feel if an advertising firm (large patrons of the arts) bought my work to display under their name? This made me think carefully about the content of my pieces. I wanted them to be dramatic and 'beautiful' from a distance. Up close they had to be sinister. It was very important to make a definite statement with the work to back up the concept I have been exploring.

Thinking about what goes in water whilst cleaning a piece filled with liquid made me think of fish hooks. Being metal and sharp, fish hooks are foreign to the soft and fleshy human body. I used fish hooks as a metaphor for advertising getting under my skin — a constant reminder. The metal is cold, gleaming, sharp and uninviting. The hooks didn't pierce or disturb the outer layer of skin but were part of it, sitting just under the surface, making any movement of the body painful.

I blew the hooks between layers of glass; however, the metal coating came away and caused lots of bubbles and stress in the glass. Copper is the only compatible metal with glass, so I had to hand-make copper hooks.

The hooks led to other copper items, such as barbed wire and copper scouring pads. The scourers I cut and 'sewed' with strands of copper wire. These pieces of metal I fashioned into shapes suggestive of clothing and corset-like garments. Corsets mean restriction of movement and breathing to achieve a tiny 'feminine' waist.

Owing to the very strong nature of the weave in the scouring pads, the glass was also restricted from blowing out where there was metal, making the connection with tight restrictive clothing even stronger.

Winding barbed wire made from copper in the second-last gather also stopped the glass from blowing readily into the mould. The wire was thicker and stronger than the scourers and held 'walls' of glass inside the vessel. What is produced looks like a highly distorted stomach in a great deal of pain, the wire cutting and pressuring the flesh, an image reflecting hunger pains and self-hatred. The outside skin of the body remains smooth, even and normal-looking. Only the transparent nature of glass reveals what is going on inside.

The copper worked well with combinations of clear and sandblasted glass, and transparent colour over opaque colour, as well as with transparent colour and clear glass on their own. I chose the colours of lipstick and nail polish (traditionally feminine), from vivid pinks through to strong apricots, oranges and reds.

CONCLUSION

Studying at the Canberra School of Art in the past year has been an intense period, producing a body of work that is both meaningful now and can be developed further in the future. It has been an interesting struggle to communicate in glass the strong feelings for my subject. Many pieces contained certain aspects of ideas, but didn't show the complete picture, making me strive for stronger work.

I enjoyed having the chance to explore new techniques such as carving with the sand blaster and painting with Paradise Paints and Blythe Enamels. This has given me a much wider vocabulary to use in conjunction with the medium of glass.

Thinking about what I was doing and staying focused was vitally important this past year. I had to make decisions constantly because of the limited time-frame and, therefore, I became more aware of what I was making and why I was making it.

Observing people looking at my work and seeing them make the connections with what I wanted to say, leads me to believe I have a successful body of work. I feel the subject I have chosen for this year has endless possibilities for the future, as the attitudes within society change.

What I am attempting to show in my work is the insidious, destructive message women get every day through the powerful effects of the media and advertising, masked as encouragement to 'better ourselves'.

TECHNICAL NOTES

Kiln Wash Recipe

1:1:1 china clay, talc and alumina

1:1 methylated spirits and water

Mix to a thin consistency and apply at least four coats.

Silk-screening

The enamel I used was black 'Degussa' bought from a ceramic supplier. The colour matures at 700–800°C and has to be thinned with water (not a turps base). The screen was one normally used for material and it worked well with the colour thinned slightly. The fact that the colour was water-based was helpful, as I had to wash the screen every second print. Unwanted colour scratched off easily with sharpened wood. I took the firings only to 650°C; however, the paint had adhered satisfactorily.

Slumping Cycle

6-mm window glass (1000 × 850 mm)

Large top-loading architectural kiln

Stage	1	2	3
Ramp (°C per h)	40	off	15
Temperature (°C)	650	525	350
Hold (h)	4	3	off

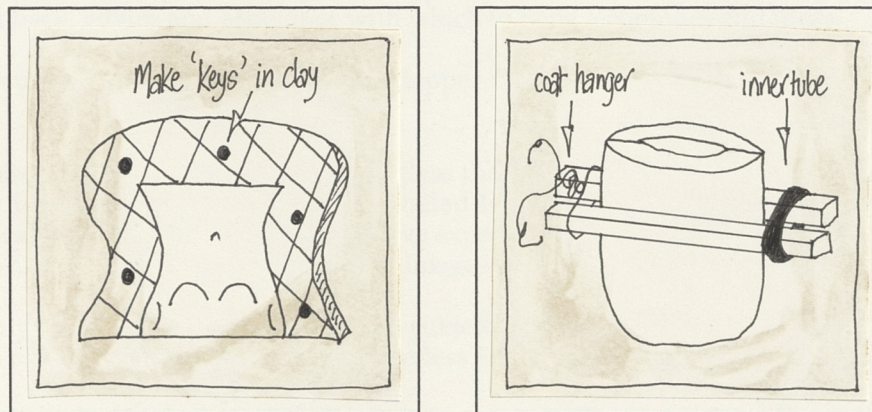
Taking the glass up slowly using time, rather than temperature, avoids devitrification.

Blowing Moulds

Take clay image, standing upside down, and build clay wall of constant width around form.

Mix up plaster and water; while still runny, flick coating onto form. When plaster gets more viscous, smooth onto form from the bottom up, preventing air bubbles.

Pull clay off and spray with 'Pure and Simple' to repeat procedure on other side. Drill air holes through nipples. Attach handles to either side with plaster and sisal (reinforcement).



Hold handles together with section of car inner tube and a coat hanger on the other side. Soak the mould well before blowing, then coat with graphite powder for a smooth black surface. Remove coat hanger to release blown glass. Dip mould in water and retouch graphite after every blow. I cut off the 'over-blow' from either side with a diamond saw.

1995 WORK PROPOSAL

Ever since I can remember. I have always found a great joy in making things. The magical process of blown glass is the medium I have settled on to explore form and colour, and express my thoughts. Since completing a BA in Melbourne five years ago, I have worked for glass-blowers and hired the Meat Market Craft Centre access workshop to make production studio glass. In 1992 and 1993 I travelled, mostly around Europe, experiencing different cultures, art and architecture. Returning to Melbourne I made production glass again, deciding I was ready to settle into an intense period of studying to develop one-off pieces with concepts I felt strongly about. Here I can gain plenty of critical feedback, advice and assistance with which to hone techniques and ideas.

After seeing some results in Melbourne of the David Hopper workshop, I made a realisation in the direction of my work.

Never before have I seen such a technique on blown glass that still allows a freedom of colour and form, yet gives an enormous scope for transferring any type of detailed image (whether it be hand-painted, silk-screened, or anything else) as it was originally intended. Now I have experimented briefly with many of the techniques that the Paradise Paints allow, I feel I can successfully convey images and forms which move me to my work.

Nudity is a politically, socially and sexually loaded subject. 'Nude' is synonymous with 'female nude' because nakedness connotes passivity, vulnerability; it is powerless and anonymous.

Gothic disgust with the naked body, especially the female, is summed up by St John Chrysostom in his warning to 'The Fallen Monk Theodore' against the outward fairness of women: 'The whole of her bodily beauty is nothing less than phlegm, blood and bile, rheum and the fluid of digested food ... are you then in a flutter of excitement about the storehouse of these things?'

The painting 'Venus With Spikes' by Gwen Hardie explains, in the tradition of the early Christian martyrs, women have been inculcated with a fear and shame of their bodies. The burdensome flesh is subject to mortification and

humiliation in the form of dieting (leading to bulimia, anorexia and concomitant amenorrhoea — loss of periods and thus of true adult sexuality), exercise, surgery, drugs, bleaching, waxing, electrolysis, the swallowing of hormones or the insertion of contraceptive devices.

I want to represent the female nude in a positive, confident and assertive manner, commenting on society's definitions of femininity and how women are surrounded by icons of perfection (through advertising imagery) which enslave them.

The work will take the form of a series of vessels. Women throughout history are referred to as vessels, as the carrier of human life used by man in many ways. Ships and cars are vessels which gain the title of 'she'. Women are vessels for the all important seed of man, who were proud to produce sons, yet ashamed and burdened if a daughter was born.

The vessels will be blown into plaster moulds to achieve a uniform size and shape of a female figure. The Paradise Paints will be applied to cups and parisons in preparation for blowing into the static mould. The imagery painted on the preformed glass will explore the confusion and demands of women to live up to perfection against the real world where humans are diverse and have to accept themselves as individuals.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Janeen Toner, my worst critic;
Philip Spelman, the cake-fuelled technical officer;
Stephen Procter, Head of Workshop;
Jane Bruce, second-in-command;
All the Glass Workshop students, who gave generously of their time;
Nigel Lendon, Convenor and always good for a laugh;
Annie Trevillian, the silk-screen queen;
Kirstie Rea, for being so generous with her time and equipment;
Andrea Jordan, the unforgiving — yet wonderful — editor; and
Mark Veselik, for always being there at the other end of that blasted phone.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Catherine Arwen Jordan

Born 1968: London, England

Education

1995–96 Candidate for Graduate Diploma of Art
Canberra School of Art, Institute of the Arts, ANU

1986–89 Bachelor of Art, Ceramic Design
Chisholm Institute of Technology

Further Study

1995 Henry Halem (USA), glass painting workshop
John Croucher (NZ), glass technology workshop
David Hopper (USA), glass painting workshop
Ruth King (USA), hot glass sculpture workshop

1994 Dante Marioni and Dick Marquis (USA), demonstration workshop

1993 Rich Royal (USA), demonstration workshop

1990 Robert Levin (USA), hot glass summer school (in NZ)

Group Exhibitions

- 1991 Glass and Ceramics, Old Cheese Factory, Victoria
Mornington Peninsula Craft Event
Diamond Valley Acquisitive Art Award
Perfume Bottle Show, Distelfink Gallery, Melbourne
Ausglass Members Show, University of Sydney
- 1990 Mornington Peninsula Craft Event
- 1989 Design in Mind, Meat Market Craft Centre, Melbourne
From Under the One Umbrella, Caulfield Arts Centre, Melbourne
Mornington Peninsula Craft Event
- 1986-89 Various 'in-college' exhibitions

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing*. Penguin, London, 1972.

Cooke, Kaz. *Real Gorgeous*. Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1994.

Lucie-Smith, Edward. *The Body — Images of the Nude*. Thames and Hudson, London, 1981.

Saunders, Gill. *The Nude — A New Perspective*. Chatto and Windus, London, 1989.

Wolf, Naomi. *The Beauty Myth*. Herbert, London, 1990.